



## Incident Command System Flexibility Arlington County, Virginia

**Summary:** *After the devastating attack on the Pentagon on 9/11, Arlington County found itself a key player in a complex crisis. Using the Incident Command System (ICS) for the on-site response operations, commanders soon understood the value of the ICS's flexibility in adapting to differing needs and complex situations.*

During the initial response to the Pentagon incident, Arlington County established the Incident Command System consistent with its best understanding of the practice. However, Arlington County Police Chief Edward A. Flynn and Deputy Chief Stephen Holl discovered that although the classical functions of ICS had been provided, another function was needed to handle site visits of dignitaries, politicians and victims' families. On the fourth day of operations, Arlington County Police Department (ACPD) officials added an ICS function involving a combination of public relations, protocol and interagency courtesy. They entitled their new ICS function "diplomacy."

This expansion of the basic ICS structure allowed ACPD officials to better handle the unique situation they faced at the Pentagon site. Visiting dignitaries and chiefs of mutual aid departments and other responder organizations were met, briefed on response operations and escorted through the site. Chief Flynn also wanted to ensure that the "extended family" – the families of the first responders – was well taken care of. ACPD arranged a special day for families with lectures on critical-incident stress, free babysitting and recognition of the critical roles played by the families of the responders.

ACPD's addition of a diplomacy function emphasizes the flexibility of the Incident Command System. By adapting the ICS structure to the needs of the situation, the incident commanders were better able to manage the recovery operation without marginalizing their community. "We had to utilize the ICS system in a way that allowed us to integrate this important function," Chief Flynn remarked. "By allowing for flexibility for ICS, we could accommodate a variety of unforeseen functions."

### Thinking Locally:

How could your agency incorporate a "diplomacy" function into the ICS framework?  
How else could the ICS framework adapt to unexpected needs?

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